



COMMITTEE FOR ACCURACY IN MIDDLE EAST REPORTING IN AMERICA

CAMERA OP-ED: THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY 'PAYS TO SLAY' AND THE MEDIA IS M.I.A.

BY: SEAN DURNS / MARCH 22, 2018



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The Palestinian Authority (PA), the U.S.-backed, aid-dependent entity that rules the West Bank, pays salaries to terrorists and their families. Congress is currently considering legislation to prevent American tax dollars from being used for this purpose, which incentivizes Palestinian terrorism. Major media outlets, however, are failing to fully cover either the PA's policy or the possible legislation—called The Taylor Force Act—that seeks to prevent Americans from unwittingly financing terrorism.

The proposed law is named after a murdered U.S. veteran.

On March 9, 2016, a former U.S. Army officer named Taylor Force was stabbed to death by a Palestinian terrorist in Israel. Force, 28, had survived deployments in war zones like Iraq and Afghanistan, only to be murdered while being part of a tour group for Vanderbilt University, where he was an MBA student studying global entrepreneurship. Ten other people were stabbed before Israeli police killed the attacker.

As a reward for his deed, that family of Force's killer will now get lifetime payments doled out by the Palestinian Authority. The PA passed laws in 2004 and 2013 stipulating that convicted terrorists and their families will receive monthly "payments." The 2004 law specifies that the money be for the "fighting sector," which it referred to as an "integral part of the fabric of Palestinian society."

What the Palestinian 'fighting sector' makes

The Palestinian Authority pays significant sums for what it has chosen to prioritize legislatively and culturally. According to a Jan. 9, 2018 report by Israel's defense ministry, the PA paid terrorists and their families over \$347 million dollars in 2017—\$160 million for jailed and released prisoners and \$190 for their families.

As Sander Gerber, a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, and Doug Feith, a senior fellow at the Hudson Institute, have pointed out: The payments and benefits are predicated in part on the length of the sender

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more people murdered or injured, the greater the payoff.

Yet, despite breaking its promises to refrain from inciting anti-Jewish violence, the PA is also a significant beneficiary of U.S. aid. According to the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem, that assistance has “totaled around \$600 million annually in recent years.”

In order to prevent U.S. taxpayer funds from making terror promotion fungible, the U.S. House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Taylor Force Act on Dec. 5, 2017. A press release by the House Foreign Affairs Committee noted that the legislation “restricts U.S. assistance to the Palestinian Authority unless it stops subsidizing terrorists through pay to slay policies.” As of this writing, however, a few anonymous Senators are—without explanation—holding up the legislation’s passage in the upper chamber.

Both the proposed law and the PA’s ‘pay to slay’ program should be news. But both have gone underreported. News outlets that have extensively tracked the story, such as *The Washington Examiner*, *The New York Post* and *The Washington Times*, are the exception. Others, meanwhile, have got their facts wrong.

A flawed ‘fact check’

The Washington Post offers a case in point. The paper ran a misleading March 14, 2018 “Fact Checker” column that minimized and obfuscated on the PA’s policies. Relying on questionable sources, *The Post* cited “documentation provided by” the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), formerly a U.S.-designated terror group and one that is led by the same man who leads the PA: Mahmoud Abbas. Worse still, *The Post* cited research about Palestinian prisoners that was provided by Defense for Children International-Palestine (DCI-P).

According to NGO Monitor, an organization that monitors non-governmental groups that are active in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, DCI-P has ties to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—a U.S.-designated terror group. The board’s secretary Fatima Daana is the widow of the commander of PFLP’s Abu Ali Mustafa Brigades and one DCI-P employee, Hashem Abu Maria, was celebrated by the PFLP as a “commander” of the terror group after his 2014 death.

Trusting terrorist-linked entities for a “fact check” on terrorist payments is poor journalism. The paper even trotted out the tired cliché that “one man’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” and claimed that a “big problem is definitional”; the PA doesn’t list payments to terrorists and their families, but instead uses words such as “Palestinian prisoners” and “martyrs.”

The PA, however, is clear on the meaning. The authority has defended the practice and refused U.S. demands to quit paying terrorists. Indeed, the same day that *The Post*’s column appeared, PA President Abbas met with Rajaei Haddad, a recently released terrorist imprisoned for his 1998 conviction of complicity in the murder of an Israeli. According to a translation provided by the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), Abbas congratulated Haddad and said, “The prisoners issue holds a special place in the priorities of the Palestinian leadership.”

The laws that provide for payments to the so-called “fighting sector” that murdered Force—which go unmentioned in Kessler’s “Fact Check”—are emblematic of a society that chooses to name streets, sports tournaments and schools after terrorists. PA-approved textbooks even use “martyrs” to explain math, according to a 2017 study by the Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education. Grotesquely, candy and other sweets are often passed around in Palestinian towns after a successful terrorist attack—including Force’s murder—as the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) has documented.

Obfuscation and more obfuscation

Yet, *The Washington Post* glosses over the incitement that is endemic in Palestinian society. Instead the paper's self-styled "Fact Check"—ostensibly about whether the Palestinian Authority pays terrorists—would rather focus on Israel. Oddly, or perhaps purposefully, fact-checker Kessler brings up the 1946 King David Hotel bombing—a more than seventy-year-old event that has nothing to do with whether the PA has a "pay to slay" program.

As the historian Daniel Gordis detailed in his 2016 book *Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn*, the hotel was bombed because "the Yishuv [the Jewish community of pre-state Israel] was relatively certain that the British had sufficient documents in storage at the building to arrest, and possibly execute, a number of leaders of the Yishuv." The documents had been seized in previous raids and highlighted, among other things, efforts by the Yishuv to allow immigrants—many of them Holocaust survivors—into British-ruled Mandate Palestine—thus violating British policy, which severely curtailed Jewish immigration to their ancestral homeland, in the years before and after, the Nazi genocide.

The Irgun, which formed to resist Britain's decision to close the gates to Europe's Jews at the height of the Holocaust, carried out the bombing and called the hotel twenty minutes prior to the attack, warning them to evacuate. Gordis also noted "the Irgun also placed calls to the French Consulate and the *Palestine Post* [the leading newspaper in the area], warning them of the impending explosion" in order to encourage civilians to evacuate. However, the calls "went unheeded" and hotel "staff ignored the warning." The leader of the Yishuv, David Ben Gurion, condemned the tragic loss of life. But the steps taken to avert civilian casualties, the reason behind choosing the target, and the condemnation that followed, are all counter opposites to Palestinian terrorism, which purposefully targets civilians and is widely praised—even rewarded—by Palestinian leaders; a fact that *The Post* does its best to obfuscate on.

Yet, Kessler devotes column space to discussing The King David Hotel bombing, and quoting DCI-P claims about Israeli detention practices—topics that have nothing to do with the simple, basic question that his column purports to answer: Does the PA pay terrorists?

In what seems to be a purposeful effort to further muddy the waters, *The Post's* "Fact Checker" writes that "the Israeli government does not even have its own official estimate" as to how much the PA pays terrorists. Instead, they rely on "research done by Yossi Kuperwasser, a former director-general of the Strategic Affairs Ministry (appointed by Netanyahu) who now works as a scholar at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs." *The Post* noted this, if implicitly, to question the Israeli government's estimate. However, the paper failed to note that Kuperwasser is a widely respected intelligence officer, who retired from Israeli military intelligence with the rank of Brigadier General. His research is used by the Israeli government—just as other governments, including the U.S., use research conducted by other retired government officials with significant expertise in a specific subject area. Kuperwasser's research is based on Palestinian sources and Kessler—who claims to have "reviewed the documents used" by Kuperwasser—is unable to cite a single inaccuracy, or specific issue, with them.

Instead, he bizarrely gives more credence to a "secret State Department" report on PA payments to terrorists. This "secret report" allegedly offers a smaller estimate of the amount that the PA pays terrorists. Israeli Prime Minister stated that the PA pays \$350 million to terrorists—an amount that Kessler claims is exaggerated. The State Department report, however, is "perhaps more than two-thirds smaller." Kessler's uncertainty regarding the exact figure of the State Department report is telling; he fails to specifically cite the report, he also doesn't state why he seems to trust this report more than the Israeli figure. Indeed, he even admits "the exact number is classified in part because of how the data used to estimate the figure was collected and *in part because U.S. officials have little confidence in the estimates* [emphasis added]." Yet, Kessler seems to have more confidence in both this "secret report" and terrorist-linked entities, than the Israeli government.

More on definitions

Other problems abound in the *Post's* “Fact Checker” column. Kessler claimed that there is no definition of terrorism in use by the U.S. government or the State Department. This is false. In *Country Reports on Terrorism*, the U.S. State Department cites a citation to a relevant passage from Section 2656f(d) of Title 22 of the United States Code:

- (1) The term “international terrorism” means terrorism involving citizens or the territory of more than one country;
- (2) The term “terrorism” means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents; and
- (3) The term “terrorist group” means any group practicing, or which has significant subgroups which practice, international terrorism.

The Post's “Fact Checker” gives Israeli Prime Minister “two Pinocchio’s” for his claim that the PA pays terrorists and their families \$350 million—but it fails to justify this rating.

The undeniable fact is this: The Palestinian Authority pays terrorists and their families. Aid money is fungible, and American taxpayers, in part, make those paychecks possible. Absent an unerring media spotlight, the PA’s ‘pay to slay’ program looks likely to continue.